



NEWSLETTER

News and updates about sage-grouse conservation in Idaho

WEST NILE VIRUS IN SAGE-GROUSE

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Update on Greater Sage-grouse proposed ESA listing

December 4, 2007: A federal judge in Boise ruled in favor of the plaintiff (Western Watersheds Project), requiring the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) to do another status review of sage-grouse. The judge ruled that the USFWS's 2005 decision was "arbitrary and capricious."

January 30, 2008: The plaintiff and USFWS agreed to a deadline of May 2009 for the USFWS to issue a new listing determination.

February 26, 2008: USFWS published details of status review process in the Federal Register. The published deadline was December 5, 2008.

February 28, 2008: The judge required the USFWS to be held to agreed-upon deadline of May 2009.

West Nile virus (WNV), a mosquito-borne flavivirus, was first detected in radio-collared greater sage-grouse in July 2003, at 4 sites in Montana, Wyoming, and Alberta, Canada. Since then WNV has been found in sage-grouse populations throughout its range, with cases in Idaho, Nevada and Oregon beginning in 2006.

Both laboratory and field studies indicate that sage-grouse are highly susceptible to WNV infection, and few infected grouse survive. Most grouse die within 3–6 days, although those experimentally vaccinated survived longer, with some antibody response prior to death. Few wild grouse have been found to produce neutralizing antibodies to WNV.

Impacts of the disease on sage-grouse are highly variable region to region, and year to year. South Dakota reported a 32% mortality rate in a 6-week period during the 2007 WNV season. Sage-grouse mortality in the Powder River Basin (Wyoming, Montana, and Saskatchewan, Canada) has ranged from 2–25% during 5 years of infection. Idaho reported eleven cases in 2006, 7 of which were on the Duck Valley Indian Reservation (DVIR). In 2007, a drought year, the DVIR had only 1 confirmed case. Oregon reported large mortalities in sage-grouse in 2006, but only confirmed WNV in a few cases, mostly

because the carcasses were too decomposed to test.

Infection rates in an area may be variable year to year based on precipitation and temperature, which changes the availability of mosquito breeding habitat. Control of standing water, and application of mosquito laricides such as methoprene (Altosid) or *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis* (BTI), to human-made ponds and ditches in sage-grouse habitat may be the most effective control mechanism. Mosquito fish (*Gambusia*) placed in isolated ponds and livestock water tanks are also effective, but should be avoided in natural waterways and habitats. Chemicals that target adult mosquitoes such as synthetic pyrethroids and malathion should be avoided in sage-grouse early brood-rearing habitats. These chemicals can affect other insects, which sage-grouse chicks may consume and become poisoned. Furthermore, reducing the insect supply can also decrease chick survival.

Spring lek counts following the West Nile virus season may be the best estimator of population impacts due to the virus. However, methods of monitoring WNV activity during the mosquito season, such as capturing grouse, sampling for WNV, and radio-telemetry, may be the best predictor of mortality during the WNV season. The biggest problem in monitoring is get-

ting to carcasses to sample them before they are scavenged. Monitoring during the active virus season may aid in determining hunting seasons.

West Nile virus is here to stay. At this point monitoring grouse to estimate the impacts year to year, and minimizing or controlling mosquito breeding habitat, are the only tools we have for managing this recent threat to sage-grouse populations. Cited articles as well as other useful articles are available upon request.



LOCAL WORKING GROUP UPDATES

The first Statewide Local Working Annual Report is now available!

You can download the report from the website:

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/grouse/>
or

Contact Ann Moser at 208-287-2705 or
amoser@idfg.idaho.gov



BIG DESERT

The Big Desert LWG continues to meet on a monthly basis at the Bingham County Senior Citizens Center, located at 20 East Pacific in Blackfoot. The group has drafted conservation measures addressing

annual grasslands, wildfire, infrastructure development, livestock, predation, sport hunting, and West Nile virus. The group will consider human disturbances, climate change, and insecticides at its

March meeting planned for Monday March 3 at 6:00 pm. The LWG has not yet nominated anyone to serve on the statewide Sage-grouse Advisory Committee (SAC).

CHALLIS

Vince Guyer will continue to represent the LWG on the SAC for the present time. The LWG was pleased to learn that funds will be provided by

the Office of Species Conservation (OSC) for 3 projects proposed in 2007. In addition, they are working with the local Cooperative Weed Man-

agement Area and agencies to map weed infestations in the planning area. No meetings are planned at this time.

EAST IDAHO UPLANDS

The East Idaho Uplands LWG continues to meet on a monthly basis. They meet in 2 locations for discussions via conference call: the regional Fish & Game office in Pocatello (1345 Barton Road) and the Soda Springs Ranger District office (410

Hooper Avenue). The group has drafted conservation measures addressing human disturbance; infrastructure development; isolated populations; urban/exurban development; mines, landfills and gravel pits; sagebrush control; West Nile virus; and annual

grasslands. The group will consider predation, agricultural expansion, and climate change at its March meeting, scheduled for Tuesday March 4 at 6:00 pm. The LWG has yet to nominate anyone to serve on the SAC.

GREATER CURLEW VALLEY

The LWG is pleased to learn that the 2 members nominated to the SAC—Dallan Nalder and Joe Terry—have been appointed by the Idaho Fish & Game Director. The group is

also looking forward to implementing 3 projects that were proposed in 2007 and recently approved by the OSC. The USFS has collected sagebrush seed and sent it to the

Lucky Peak nursery to grow for the Curlew LWG fire rehabilitation project. The seeding should be ready to plant next year. No meetings are planned at this time.

JARBIDGE

The Jarbidge LWG has completed its plan! Group participants have written letters of endorsement for the LWG

plan. However, the plan has not been updated since the Murphy Complex Fire. They hope to meet again in Febru-

ary if they are able to secure a facilitator for the meeting.

NORTH MAGIC VALLEY

The North Magic Valley LWG's progress towards their plan has been somewhat slow. The last few meetings the group has instead been focus-

ing on responding to other issues including the Friedman Memorial Airport expansion and power line proposals. The group's representative on

the SAC will be John Peavey. Tess O'Sullivan will serve as his alternate.

LOCAL WORKING GROUP UPDATES, CONTINUED.

OWYHEE

The Owyhee LWG met in December to talk about the sage-grouse lawsuit. The juniper mastication project is very important to the group and they look forward to see-

ing their proposal implemented. There did not appear to be any problems with West Nile virus in 2007, probably because of the drought. The Owyhee LWG

will now be meeting at the museum in Murphy. The group will be getting a spot to post sage-grouse information on the Owyhee County website.



SHOSHONE BASIN

The group has secured funding to do an exclosure project on private land. The Shoshone Basin LWG has not met

formally this year. They need a new facilitator to get back together again, as their previous facilitator was reas-

signed. They are very close to having their plan completed.

SOUTH MAGIC VALLEY

No report. The group is still informal and is currently look-

ing for a facilitator. They hope to have their first public meet-

ing this winter or spring.

UPPER SNAKE

The Upper Snake LWG is proud to serve as a sponsor for the upcoming 6th Annual Dubois Grouse Days. Plans are underway for this year's festivities, which will include a photography workshop with professional photographer Tim Sommers. The Upper

Snake LWG recently completed a revision to their 2005 *Plan for Increasing Sage-grouse Populations*. The LWG was pleased that Lynn Burtenshaw has been appointed to represent them on the SAC; Richard Savage will be his alternate. The Ex-

ecutive Committee is currently asking that all agencies with representative membership slots on the LWG to identify who is presently assigned to serve on the LWG. No meetings are planned at this time.

WEST CENTRAL

The group's January meeting was cancelled due to snow, but was rescheduled for February 13. Gene Gray is currently completing his field notes from 2007. Of the 16 birds radio-collared last year,

8 are still being monitored. Two of the birds that died tested negative for West Nile virus. They plan on collaring 38 birds this year. The LWG has asked the agencies to informally review their draft

CCAA. They hope to have the final submitted to the USFWS by the end of February. Gene Gray will continue to represent the West Central LWG on the SAC.

DUCK VALLEY INDIAN RESERVATION

Twelve tribal members and 13 staff helped collect sagebrush seed, which was sent to the Lucky Peak Nursery for cleaning. The seed will be used on various fire rehabilitation projects in southern Idaho, including the Murphy Complex Fire in eastern Owy-

hee County. The Yakima Tribe in Washington has requested sage-grouse to transplant to their reservation, but no formal proposal has been put forward. Construction of the power line from C.J. Strike Dam to the reservation is underway.



IDAHO SAGE-GROUSE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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Visit our website!

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/grouse/>

SAGEBRUSH SEED COLLECTION BY RICH HOWARD

On December 8, 2007, I helped collect sagebrush seed about 10 miles east of Boise. This seed will be used to help rehabilitate part of the 650,000 acres burned in the Murphy Complex Fire last summer. The seed we collected was sent to the Lucky Peak Nursery, where it was dried, and filtered through mechanical hoppers to "clean" the seed. The seed is scheduled to be flown onto the burn area in January and February of 2008. The seed will be loaded into bins attached to a helicopter and broadcasted across the burn. The goal is to help jumpstart the return of native vegetation by several years. About 115 volunteers came out on December 8 to help restore the sagebrush sea.



Bill Platts, SAC member, and friends from the Ada County Fish and Game league with collection hoppers full of sagebrush seed.

Photos by
Rich Howard



Mary Dudley, Fish and Game Volunteer Coordinator, and Mike Young overseeing the collection and storage of the seed.

DUBOIS GROUSE DAYS APRIL 11-12, 2008



On Friday and Saturday, April 11 & 12, residents of Dubois, Idaho, and an array of private, state and federal agencies will host the Sixth Annual Dubois Grouse Days to celebrate Greater Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed grouse and the wonderful environments that are their home.

This unique festival offers everyone the opportunity to watch grouse strut and dance. There are 3 organized field trips to choose from to view sage and sharp-tailed

grouse on their leks. Along the way you will learn about the sagebrush ecosystem and other wildlife species that live there.

There are also lectures to attend, educational activities, and displays from local artists. You can also learn about the cultural and natural history of the high desert, tour local conservation projects, and talk with ranchers and wildlife biologists working to conserve grouse.

For information on how to register for this

event and a schedule of activities, you can download the Dubois Grouse Days brochure from the grouse website: (<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/grouse/>) or contact Jeri Tavener at (208) 374-5422 or jtavener@mudlake.net.



Columbian sharp-tailed grouse photo by Hub Quade